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SUBJECT: HIJAZI WILL APPEAL THIRD DEATH SENTENCE; ABU SAYYAF TRIAL RESUMES

REF: AMMAN 06683

SUMMARY

1. (U) Two high-profile terrorism-related cases resumed in Jordan's State Security Court this week. For the third time, the court on December 8 sentenced Jordanian-American citizen Ra'ed Hijazi to death for his role in plotting anti-U.S. attacks during the millennial celebrations in Jordan in December 1999. Separately, well-known Jordanian extremist Mohammad al-Shalabi (aka Abu Sayyaf) and several alleged accomplices again declared their innocence in an anti-U.S. plot when their trial resumed on December 7. End Summary.

JORDANIAN-AMERICAN SENTENCED TO DEATH, FOR THE THIRD TIME

2. (U) Jordan's State Security Court on December 8 for the third time sentenced Jordanian-American citizen Ra'ed Hijazi to death on charges related to his role in the December 1999 plot to conduct attacks during the millennial celebrations in Jordan (see ref). The court found Hijazi guilty of "plotting subversive acts in the Kingdom and manufacturing explosives," as well as possessing an unlicensed automatic weapon and explosive material "with illicit intent."

3. (U) Hijazi maintains he is innocent of the charges and his lawyers say he intends to appeal -- again. "I did not do anything to deserve such a verdict. I did not commit any crime," Hijazi shouted from his cage as the verdict was announced. His lawyer, Jalal Darwish, told press: "We were expecting this verdict. Nothing has changed and the verdict is like the last one and did not come with anything new."

ABU SAYYAF TRIAL RESUMES, DEFENDANTS RETRACT CONFESSIONS

4. (U) Meanwhile, in another high-profile case, the trial of local extremist Mohammad al-Shalabi (aka Abu Sayyaf) and his alleged accomplices resumed on December 7. Nine of the men, charged with plotting subversive acts in Jordan -- including a possible attack against the U.S. Embassy in Amman -- retracted earlier confessions saying they were given under duress. During his second court appearance since his September 27 arrest, Abu Sayyaf repeated his claim of torture and declared his innocence: "I was tortured into confessing that I committed subversive acts. I do not know any of the suspects and I only met them when I was imprisoned by the authorities." The trial will resume on December 14.

COMMENT

5. (U) In Hijazi's case, it is unclear whether the court satisfied concerns from the appeals court about improper procedures used the earlier trials. Jordanian law allows a defendant to appeal verdicts from the security court indefinitely, so if the two courts have unresolved issues, we expect this nearly four-year-old case to continue into the new year.

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